



*Arthur J. Morgan*

## IMPERIALISM AT THE INTER-COLONIAL CONFERENCE.

1894

By J. CASTELL-HOPKINS.

It has been the great mission of Canada to forge the chief links in that marvellous chain of union which is slowly but surely welding the interests and institutions of the British Empire into one harmonious whole. By the Confederation of its Provinces in 1867 the first impetus was given to the principle which now permeates the politics and fills the aspirations of the people of Australia and South Africa, and which will yet dominate the institutions of Great Britain and control the constitution of the Empire. By the construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway it opened up vast territories to British settlement and cultivation; created cities and towns which are now reaching out for trade with the distant east; provided an Imperial highway for the transport of troops and munitions of war; and completed commercially that unity of Canada which in a national sense had been consummated at Confederation. By the creation of a steamship line from Vancouver to Sydney, and the voting of a large subsidy which practically ensures the completion of a fast line of steamers between Canada and England, the Dominion has formed a substantial basis for the closer commercial relations which should in the future exist between the different sections of the Empire.

Meantime the Mother-Country has not been idle, or indifferent to these important though not always clearly understood movements. By the formation of the Imperial Federation League in 1884, by the co-operation in its work of so many leading statesmen, and by the active labours of representative men such as Lord Rosebery, the old Manchester school of politicians and their opinions have been destroyed, and only the amusing gyrations of Mr. Labou-

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chere or the impotent wailings of Mr. Goldwin Smith are left to mark the scene of its former activities. By the Colonial and Indian Exhibition of 1886, the resources of the external Empire were revealed to millions of people at home, and an impetus given to that growing desire for better relations and clearer knowledge of the Colonies which soon found expression, through the keen foresight and patriotic vigour of the Prince of Wales, in the foundation and completion of the Imperial Institute. And by the Colonial Conference held in London during 1887 the statesmen of the Empire met in genuine consultation for the first time, paving the way, as Lord Salisbury prophetically observed, for many similar and greater gatherings in the future.

Thus step by step the principle of union has grown until its magnificent application in the present year has been rendered possible. For it must be remembered that even if no immediate practical result were to follow from the gathering—and that is a supposition which it is hardly necessary to discuss—the mere meeting of representative men, without any Imperial initiative, from British America, British Africa, and British Australasia, to discuss mutual interests and plight the troth of Empire anew, would be an event of sufficient import to mark it as an epoch in British history. But the terms and conditions under which the Conference was called show that if commercial considerations were nominally paramount, yet Imperialism had a great underlying influence. For years Canada while trying, without any great success, to arrange trade relations with Brazil and the West Indies, France, Spain, and the United States, has also meanwhile been developing the internal conditions to which the completion of the Canadian-Australasian Steamship Line drew sudden attention.

Had it not been for the expansive projects of the Canadian Pacific and the success of Mr. Huddart's enterprise, combined with the local depression in the Australian Colonies which made them willingly turn the ear to the Canadian charmer when speaking of commercial develop-

ment and better relations, we might have had to wait a little longer for what has just taken place. But the Dominion Government is essentially British in policy and sentiment; its leaders belong to a party which infinitely prefers Imperial trade to American and foreign commerce; one of its chief supporters in this respect is Sir William Van-Horne, whose great ability and energy of character have made him a power in national as well as railway circles; and it was therefore to be expected that the railway, canal, and steamship policy of the past fifteen years, extending as it always did to the east and the west, would ultimately result in some effort at closer union with Australia and Britain. Such was the dream and the determination of Sir John Macdonald; such we may hope will be its realization in part at least, under the Premiership of Sir John Thompson.

The way for the Hon. Mackenzie Bowell's official and preliminary visit to Australia was paved by journeys through Canada on the part of Sir George Dibbs and the Hon. Edmund Barton of New South Wales and Sir T. McIlwraith of Queensland. All these returned home each with a strong perception of the possibilities of greater trade and unity. On the 17th of September following, Mr. Bowell sailed for Australia in order to confer with the several Governments there with a view to the promotion of trade between the Colonies and Canada. His position as Minister of Trade and Commerce, and his intimate acquaintance with Canadian requirements made him an ideal diplomatist, which advantages a personal enthusiasm in the mission served to further enhance. But—fortunately as we may now conclude—it was found impossible to negotiate satisfactorily with so many distinct Colonies in the short time at his disposal, and arrangements were therefore made for the Conference which met at Ottawa on the 28th of June last, and to which South Africa and the Imperial Government joined in sending representatives.



The Delegates were as follows :—

*The Imperial Government.*

The Right Hon. the Earl of Jersey, P.C., G.C.M.G.

*Canada.*

The Hon. Mackenzie Bowell, P.C., Minister of Trade and Commerce; the Hon. Sir Adolphe Caron, P.C., K.C.M.G., Postmaster-General; the Hon. Geo. E. Foster, P.C., L.L.D., Minister of Finance; Sandford Fleming, Esq., C.M.G.

*New South Wales.*

The Hon. F. B. Suttor, M.L.A., Minister of Public Instruction.

*Tasmania.*

The Hon. Nicholas Fitzgerald.

*Cape of Good Hope.*

Sir Henry De Villiers, K.C.M.G., Chief Justice; Sir Charles Mills, K.C.M.G., C.B., Agent General in London; the Hon. Jan Hendrick Hofmeyr, M.L.A.

*South Australia.*

The Hon. Thomas Playford, Agent General in London.

*New Zealand.*

Alfred Lee-Smith, Esq.

*Victoria.*

Sir Henry John Wrixon, K.C.M.G., Q.C.; the Hon. Nicholas Fitzgerald, M.L.C.; the Hon. Simon Fraser, M.L.C.

*Queensland.*

The Hon. A. J. Thynne, M.L.C., Member of the Executive Council; the Hon. William Forrest.

The Delegates were men in every way fitted to deal with the issues which they met to discuss. Most of them were ministers or ex-ministers of their respective Colonies. Lord Jersey had distinguished himself as a popular and able Colonial Governor. Mr. Hofmeyr is a Cape Colony leader whose name is known wherever South Africa is thought of, and Dutch loyalty to the British Crown appreciated. Mr. Sandford Fleming is the father of the cable scheme, and the engineer to whom the Canadian Pacific Railway owed so much in its constructive stages: their

very names were a guarantee of the importance of the gathering.

After a formal opening ceremony in the Senate Chamber, distinguished by welcoming speeches of great eloquence from Lord Aberdeen as Governor-General and Sir John Thompson as Premier, the Conference settled down to business, first passing an address to the Queen in which assurances were given of earnest loyalty, and of the desire of those charged with administering affairs in the Colonies to vie with Her Majesty's Imperial advisers "in upholding the ancient monarchy under which it is our happiness to live and in doing our part to hand down, unimpaired, to later generations, this great symbol of our union and our strength." It was decided not to admit the press, because of the danger of discursiveness which might follow; and arrangements were made for voting by Colonies.

The Presidential address was then delivered. In it Mr. Bowell went over much preliminary ground, describing, in brief, the origin and purpose of the Conference as being an extension of trade between the Colonies by the removal of impediments and the improvement of facilities. Abstract questions, political arrangements and defence considerations—except indirectly—were beyond its domain. He referred at length to the difficulties which were thrown in the way of closer trade relations by the unfortunate British treaties with Belgium and the German Zollverein, under the terms of which those countries would have to be admitted to any fiscal privileges which one Colony might give to another. Later it was found that the Constitutions granted to the Australasian Colonies absolutely forbade discrimination in favour of any external country, whether British or foreign. Mr. Bowell quoted the address to the Queen which unanimously passed the Canadian Parliament in 1892 asking for relief from these restrictions, and after giving the total trade of the British Empire as £426,300,112—exclusive of Great Britain—concluded that "a judicious adjustment of tariffs" might divert the great share of this commerce which was

done with foreign countries, into British channels. He believed that this object could be attained by each Colony retaining perfect autonomy as regards its tariff rates, whether on a basis of free trade or protection, with the one and sole restriction, that on all articles on which duties are charged, uniform preferential rates on direct importations shall be accorded to all members of a Confederation to be founded for that purpose, and to the Mother-Country, as against the rest of the world.

As the first step in this policy all treaties should be abrogated which in any way opposed its consummation. Further steps suggested were the appointment of a joint commission to insure uniformity of practice in the assessment of duties and the classifications for statistical purposes ; a uniform statistical period ; an interchange of blue-books and commercial literature ; a general copyright system ; Inter-British cable connection ; and steamship subsidies in given directions. The first motion passed by the Conference was moved, on the day following Mr. Bowell's speech, by Sir Henry Wrixon and seconded by Mr. Thynne. It read as follows, and caused a most diversified discussion, but was finally carried unanimously :

"That provision should be made by Imperial legislation enabling the Dependencies of the Empire to enter into agreements of Commercial reciprocity, including the power of making differential tariffs with Great Britain or with one another."

Sir Henry Wrixon in his speech showed how completely the Colonies now had their hands tied in making mutual arrangements, though under the beneficial treaty-making system which Canada enjoyed she could, with the co-operation of the British ministry and the subsequent approval of the Imperial Parliament, practically arrange her own treaties with foreign powers. The same right was desired by all the Colonies in dealing with each other. The Australian Colonies could, for instance—under Federation—discriminate in favour of each other, but not in favour of external

Colonies. Sir Henry de Villiers pointed out that in South Africa, the Colonies have been given the right to enter into a Customs' union among themselves or with other States in their vicinity, but that the relationship was limited to South Africa and the duties levied could apply only to goods imported over-land and not to those imported by sea. Mr. Fraser of Victoria looked forward to the day when all the Colonies would have one Customs' tariff.

Just here ensued a somewhat prolonged discussion of the treaty with France recently ratified by the Dominion Parliament. Mr. Playford expressed the belief that a preference was being given to French wines over those of Australia and South Africa. This brought a prompt denial from the Canadian Minister of Finance, who also stated that "we would not bind ourselves not to allow other wines to come in at the same rate." The question, however, of whether the treaty would prevent discrimination in favour of those Colonies and against France, continued to trouble the delegates until, on the following day, Mr. Foster categorically declared that it would not, basing his assertion upon the fact that the treaty only bound Canada not to admit the products of any "third power" at a lower rate—the word "power" in his opinion meaning a foreign country and not a Colony. It is of course likely that France will object to this interpretation, if it is ever put in practical operation; but there is no doubt that Mr. Foster is right in looking upon the British Empire as a unit in foreign negotiations, although the principle of including or excluding Colonies from treaties at their own sweet will, may logically somewhat mar his position. Apparently, too, Canada, has been very nearly doing what she is earnestly asking England to undo—tying her own hands as regards the making of inter-imperial arrangements along certain lines.

Mr. Foster, in moving the resolutions that devolved on him, made an eloquent appeal for preferential trade relations and the formation of an Inter-colonial Trade Union. Great Britain was not yet prepared for the placing of duties upon



any foreign products in return for a preference in Colonial markets; but he believed the time would come. Meanwhile they should unite among themselves and build up an Imperial trade upon a basis of Imperial favour. Future growth and development in the external empire would inevitably bring the Mother-Country into the trade arrangement, ensure the safety of her food supply, and enhance to an enormous extent production in the Colonies and their demand for British goods. Mr. Fitzgerald objected that the Victorian Parliament would never consent to any arrangement which would place British goods on a worse footing than those of any other part of the Empire. "Without Great Britain being included, I see no chance of getting its consent to any modification." Mr. Thynne, however, promptly pointed out that to await the favourable action of the Mother-Country in trade discrimination would postpone the matter indefinitely, whilst Mr. Foster spoke of the Canadian Reciprocity Treaty of 1854 with the United States, in which a number of American goods were admitted free without injury to Great Britain which did not export any of them. Even a suspicion of difficulty was averted, however, by an Act admitting them free from England also. Ultimately, and after some days' discussion, Mr. Foster's resolutions were adopted on division, as follows :—

"Whereas: The stability and progress of the British Empire can be best assured by drawing continually closer the bands that unite the Colonies with the Mother-Country, and by the continuous growth of a practical sympathy and co-operation in all that pertains to the common welfare ;

"And whereas: This co-operation and unity can in no way be more effectually promoted than by the cultivation and extension of the mutual and profitable interchange of their products ;

"Therefore resolved: That this Conference records its belief in the advisability of a Customs' arrangement between Great Britain and her Colonies by which trade within the

Empire may be placed on a more favourable footing than that which is carried on with foreign countries ;

"Further resolved : That until the Mother-Country can see her way to enter into a Customs' arrangement with her Colonies, it is desirable that, when empowered so to do, the Colonies of Great Britain, or such of them as may be disposed to accede to this view, take steps to place each other's products, in whole or in part, on a more favoured Customs' basis than is accorded to the like products of foreign countries ;

"Further resolved : That for the purpose of this resolution the South African Customs' Union be considered as part of the territory capable of being brought within the scope of the contemplated trade arrangements."

Messrs. Thynne, Lee-Smith and Suttor spoke strongly against asking England to change her free-trade policy, believing the idea to be at present impracticable, and the vote by Colonies stood as follows :

YEAS.—Canada, Tasmania, Cape of Good Hope, South Australia, Victoria—5.

NOES.—New South Wales, New Zealand, Queensland—3.

It may be safely said, however, that the delegates did not altogether represent their respective Colonies in this vote. No one disputes Sir Thomas McIlwraith's being a representative Queensland statesman and his advocacy of preferential trade has been far more forcible than Mr. Thynne's vote will perhaps prove to be against it. Mr. Lee-Smith is a merchant and pronounced free-trader, who can hardly in this case prove in touch with the large protectionist party in New Zealand. However that may be, all the delegates were so devoted to the general idea of closer trade relations that it is not likely that theoretical considerations will prevail against their desire to carry out successfully the general aim of the Conference.

The Cable proposals came in for long and serious consideration. A resolution was moved by the Hon. Mr. Suttor, and a most exhaustive paper was read by Mr. Sand-

ford Fleming. The former referred to the inception of the scheme in a definite shape through the resolution passed at the Colonial Conference of 1887, and to the delays which had followed in connection with the promised Imperial survey. The survey, he thought, would cost £36,000, and the total work about £2,000,000. He favoured a Company undertaking the enterprise with a joint Government guarantee against loss. Mr. Playford spoke of the Continental telegraph, 2,000 miles long, which South Australia had constructed, the trade of which would be most injuriously affected by the new cable. But, he added, in words which deserve to be remembered as embodying the most practical form of Imperial patriotism: "My Government wishes me to inform this Conference, that if this cable is required for Imperial and for public purposes, for the good of the Empire, South Australia is not going to stand in the way, and will support the cable."

Speaking on behalf of Queensland, Mr. Thynne estimated the cost at £1,800,000 and thought that "it would be worth the while of the Australasian Colonies alone to bear the cost, if they could be sure of the cable being served for a week after a declaration of war by or against England." He denounced the "grasping monopoly" of the Eastern Extension Telegraph Company. Sir Henry Wrixon was fully as patriotic as the two previous speakers. "What we are really anxious about is the Imperial and national point of view," he declared. He favoured England contributing one-third, Canada one-third, and Australasia one-third, of the cost. Mr. Bowell said he disagreed entirely with the fears expressed by some as to the difficulties of the undertaking. He "had often heard it stated that the Canadian Pacific Railway would not pay for the grease on its wheels. The other day it had declared a dividend of 5 per cent., with a large reserve." Sir Charles Mills urged that the cable should be ultimately extended to South Africa and spoke of the strategic and commercial reasons which strongly pointed to the desirability of doing so. Two motions regarding it passed unanimously.

This practically closed the Conference. A despatch had been received from Lord Rosebery speaking of the event as "a happy augury for the future of the Empire"; and banquets, with innumerable speeches and enthusiastic welcomes, were yet to follow at Ottawa, Toronto, Montreal and Quebec. But the business ended with this resolution; and not long after, the Conference adjourned with a vote of thanks to Lord Jersey, who had filled his position of Imperial spokesman with tact and ability. There is no doubt that the occasional pointed questions asked, and the observations made by him were of considerable practical value; and whatever the immediate fate of the resolutions and opinions thus given to the Empire and the world may be, there can be no two opinions as to the ultimate importance of the gathering. It has set in motion a principle which will change the entire Imperial system, arrest the currents of separation which were arising in some quarters, and direct men's thoughts more and more towards Imperial Unity and co-operation, in trade, in defence, and in legislation. And out of thought comes action.

The proposed cable is now only a matter of a few years. It was left to the action of Canada; and the first steps have already been taken. The advantages will be very great to all concerned. The heavy charges rendered necessary at present by the circuitous route and frequent repetition of messages make the present line of little use to business men on opposite sides of the Pacific, and ruinously handicap its young mercantile marine and the successful development of commerce. Mr. Sandford Fleming estimates the rate over the new cable at 2s. a word and claims that it would reduce charges between Australia and England from 4s. 9d. to 3s. 3d. He believes the earnings of the Pacific line in ten years, upon that basis, would at the very lowest figures amount to £153,000. His estimate of cost depends upon the route chosen and runs from £1,610,000 to £1,978,000. So much for an enterprise which will give the Empire an all-British cable and telegraphic communication between London, Australia, and ultimately Cape-Town.



Commercial development of some sort is almost certain to follow the Conference. Great Britain may not move at once in giving the desired opening for preferential trade ; but local industrial interests may be depended upon to make the start. It is obvious that what the United States have done in this connection, Canada can also do. The following table shows how their trade has developed, mainly through having a line of steamers, much inferior to those which the Dominion has put on the route, and despite having a tropical region within their own borders which produces very similar articles to those grown in Australia :

<i>Year.</i>	<i>U.S. Imports from Australasia.</i>			<i>U.S. Exports to Australasia.</i>		
1860	...	...	\$130,000	...	...	\$4,070,000
1870	...	...	280,000	...	...	2,830,000
1880	...	...	2,292,000	...	...	4,690,000
1890	...	...	4,280,000	...	...	11,170,000
1891	...	...	6,240,000	...	...	12,890,000
1892	...	...	8,490,000	...	...	11,250,000

And the great bulk of this trade is in products which Canada excels in manufacturing, and in imports of a kind which Canada now obtains largely from the United States. The Republic exports considerable quantities of agricultural implements, carriages, chemicals, fish, manufactures of iron, steel, leather and paper, petroleum, and manufactured tobacco and wood. Yet, although the Dominion can compete in nearly all of these products, it only sends Australia from \$300,000 to \$500,000 worth a year. Hence the very evident opening for a substantial interchange. During an informal discussion at the Conference, Mr. Suttor enumerated as the articles which Australia could sell to Canada : wool which is produced in immense quantities, frozen beef and mutton, which can be got in Sydney for 2 cents a pound and costs 12 cents in British Columbia, canned meats, raw hides and skins, hard woods for railway ties and street paving, fruits such as lemons, oranges and mandarins, and sugar. Amongst the things which could be taken from Canada would be paper, which

is not made in Australia, cotton goods and frozen and canned salmon. Mr. Lee-Smith stated that the Massey-Harris Co. of Toronto have already shipped 4,000 cultivators to New Zealand. That colony could send woollen goods, superior gum and flax, and rabbit skins, and would purchase frozen salmon, hops and paper. Other articles mentioned by delegates were rough timber, matches, and petroleum, all of which could be obtained from the Dominion. Sir Henry de Villiers said that the Cape could offer wool, diamonds, wine and fruit, and would take lumber in large quantities, together with agricultural implements and paper.

To all those, therefore, who look at practical considerations alone the result of the gathering will probably be thought satisfactory. But to all who feel the pulse of Empire and realize something of the mission and place of British countries in the world, the success of the Conference will hardly be measured by the possible exchange of miscellaneous merchandise, in greater or less quantities. This is a most important matter; but the great central idea is that co-operation has now become an Imperial principle, and that loyalty to the Crown is becoming crystallised into practice. When the Hon. T. B. Suttor declared, at the great banquet in Toronto, that "he felt sure that they in Canada as well as the Australians and the Cape Colonists would be always ready to fight to the very last man for the Empire," he illustrated a sentiment which is steadily growing. When Sir Henry De Villiers spoke at Montreal of the loyalty of the Dutch at the Cape of Good Hope his words were proven by the presence and the well-known views of Mr. Jan Hendrik Hoffmeyr, whilst his reference to the calumnies spread abroad concerning the loyalty of the French-Canadians was fittingly responded to by the Hon. J. A. Chapleau's description of himself as "a French-Canadian Governor and a life-long Britisher."

To Canadians the eloquent speech of Mr. Chapleau is a proverb, but it must have come as a revelation to the visitors. He is in this connection the legitimate successor

of Sir George Cartier, who proclaimed himself "an Englishman speaking French," and of Sir E. P. Taché who declared that "the last shot fired in North America in defence of the Union Jack would be by a French-Canadian." At the Quebec banquet to the delegates, Mr. Chapleau—who is Governor of the Province—welcomed them "in their mission of peace and British fraternity;" and he continued in words well worth remembering:

"Sir, the lofty tree of the British Empire bears on its limbs, courage, intelligence, power, public spirit and philanthropy, industry and wealth, all the productions of human skill and genius. And above all it bears union and peace, union of mind and peace of conscience. Kneeling beneath that admirable structure we should thank Providence for the great gift we have received."

With these words echoing in their minds the representatives of many States of a vast Empire finally dispersed. Their mission had been a noble one; the occasion, a unique and historic event; the visit to the Dominion, a pleasant, and, it may well be hoped, a profitable trip. The end is not yet; and as the Ottawa Conference recedes into the dim distance and is succeeded by other and seemingly greater gatherings, its importance may be somewhat overshadowed and its deliberations partly forgotten by the great mass of an Imperial people. But it is safe to say that history will do it justice; and that down through all "the ringing grooves of change" it will be carried as the first public political plank in the re-construction of the British Empire, and the practical commencement of an Imperial Federation whose greatness and destiny no man can measure.

Toronto, August 15, 1894.

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